

1 PROGRAMMABLE THERMOSTAT INCORPORATING A LIQUID CRYSTAL DISPLAY  
2 SELECTIVELY PRESENTING ADAPTABLE SYSTEM MENUS INCLUDING  
3 CHANGEABLE INTERACTIVE VIRTUAL BUTTONS

4 Cross-Reference to Related Applications

5 This application is a continuation in part of pending United States Patent  
6 Application No. 10/060,768 filed 01/30/2002. This application is related to: co-pending  
7 United States Application No. 10/XXX,XXX entitled "Programmable Thermostat  
8 Including a Feature for Providing a Running Total for the Cost of Energy Consumed  
9 During a Given Period for Heating and/or Cooling a Conditioned Space" by Howard B.  
10 Rosen, filed on even date herewith; and co-pending United States Application No.  
11 10/XXX,XXX entitled "Programmable Thermostat Incorporating a Liquid Crystal Display  
12 and Having a Feature for Mounting Horizontally, Vertically and Any Intermediate  
13 Orientation" by Howard B. Rosen, filed on even date herewith.

14 Field of the Invention

15 The present invention relates to a programmable thermostat incorporating an  
16 interactive liquid crystal display (LCD), and, more particularly, to such a thermostat in  
17 which the LCD selectively presents adaptable menus, including variable  
18 representations of virtual buttons, in order to simplify user programming in accordance  
19 with a given environmental control system's configuration.

20 Background of the Invention

21 Thermostats have been used for many years as temperature sensitive switches  
22 which control heating and/or cooling equipment for conditioning a space in which the  
23 thermostat, or a temperature sensor connected to the thermostat, is placed. In the well  
24 known manner, a simple thermostat can be adjusted to establish a temperature set  
25 point such that, when the temperature in the conditioned space reaches the set point,  
26 the thermostat interacts with the heating and/or/cooling equipment to take suitable  
27 action to heat or cool the conditioned space as may be appropriate for the season as  
28 established by a user.

29 Modern thermostat systems, which take advantage of the ongoing rapid  
30 advances in electronic technology and circuit integration, have many features which  
31 provide more precise supervision of the heating and/or cooling equipment to achieve

1 more economical and more comfortable management of the temperature of a  
2 conditioned space. Many modern thermostat systems include a real time clock, a  
3 memory and a data processor to run a process control program stored in the memory;  
4 Such thermostats accurately measure the temperature of a temperature sensor  
5 disposed in the conditioned space and make decisions to send control signals to the  
6 heating and/or cooling equipment in order to closely control the temperature of the  
7 conditioned space. The use of programmed thermostat systems permits anticipating  
8 and minimizing hysteresis or overshoot of the temperature in the conditioned space. In  
9 addition, the program can specify different set points at different times of the day and  
10 week and may also include a "vacation" mode which employs different set points when  
11 the conditioned space is not occupied for an extended period.

12 Many modern thermostat systems are programmable by a user. Typically, prior  
13 art programmable thermostat systems employ a set of fixed position, button-actuated  
14 switches to be depressed in a precise sequence to program set points (which may vary  
15 with the day of the week) for programmable time periods which may include a vacation  
16 mode. The programming sequence may be followed on a separate display, typically an  
17 LCD with segmented text characters. In some modern thermostats, "virtual" buttons are  
18 presented on the LCD itself which is juxtaposed with a touch pad to effect an interactive  
19 touch screen.

20 There is a fundamental problem with the prior art programmable thermostat  
21 systems: they are difficult to program to the extent that some users are unable to  
22 successfully program them. This is because the user interfaces which have been  
23 employed in prior art programmable interfaces are not highly intuitive. Programmable  
24 thermostat systems have incorporated fixed position real or virtual buttons, at least  
25 some of which have multi-functions depending upon the point which a user has reached  
26 in the programming process. The user must usually refer to and attempt to decipher a  
27 programming manual (which is often difficult for the average user to readily understand)  
28 as the programming proceeds. But, the programming process is so complex to follow  
29 while trying to remember the instructions that many users give up, and the full  
30 capabilities of the thermostat system cannot be utilized.

1       Outside of the art of programmable thermostat systems and programmable  
2 thermostats, dot matrix LCDs, which have pixel display elements arranged in rows and  
3 columns, are widely used. Dot matrix LCDs are not common as user-visible displays on  
4 programmable thermostats for viewing alphanumeric and iconic graphic information  
5 although such a thermostat is disclosed in, and particular features claimed in, co-  
6 pending United States Patent Application No. 10/440,474, filed May 15, 2003, and  
7 entitled: "Reverse Images in a Dot Matrix LCD for an Environmental Control Device" by  
8 Howard B. Rosen, incorporated by reference herein.

9       This limited use of dot matrix LCDs in programmable thermostats is because of  
10 basic engineering and practical considerations. Displayed information for a  
11 programmable thermostat generally includes such things as environmental conditions,  
12 heating and/or cooling equipment operation or non-operation, operational modes of the  
13 thermostat and the like. The most important information in thermostat displays is  
14 capable of being formed from segmented alphanumeric characters on less expensive  
15 LCDs without dot matrix capability and with reduced requirements for memory and  
16 programming.

17       Thus, dot matrix LCDs have not been widely used in prior art user  
18 programmable thermostats through a failure to understand an extended functionality  
19 capability of those devices when dot matrix LCDs are employed with a touch pad to  
20 effect an interactive display. This extended functionality is exploited to advantage in the  
21 present invention both to greatly simplify user programming and to relieve the  
22 manufacturer of the necessity to fabricate variants of the thermostat to suit the control  
23 and display aspects of various heating and/or cooling environments.

24       While the present invention may be practiced using segmented LCDs, it is  
25 preferably embodied using dot matrix LCDs.

26 Objects of the Invention

27       It is therefore a broad object of this invention to provide a field programmable  
28 thermostat which is very easy for a user to program.

29       It is another broad object of this invention to provide a field programmable  
30 thermostat which may be user-configured to limit functionality only as necessary for the  
31 specific conditioned space for which the program is being established.

1        It is a more specific object of this invention to provide a programmable  
2 thermostat in which the menus displayed on a touch screen during user programming  
3 and temperature adjustment are simplified according to the specific heating and/or  
4 cooling system employed in the specific conditioned space for which the program is  
5 being established.

6        Summary of the Invention

7        Briefly, these and other objects of the invention are provided by a programmable  
8 thermostat system for controlling space conditioning equipment and which includes: a  
9 transparent touch pad juxtaposed with an LCD (preferably dot matrix) to constitute a  
10 touch screen for interactive interface with a user; one or more environmental condition  
11 sensors for providing an electrical signal indicative of the one or more sensed  
12 environmental conditions of a conditioned space; and a processor including: a central  
13 processing unit, a real time clock, a memory coupled to the central processing unit for  
14 storing program and data information and an input/output unit coupled between the  
15 processor and the touch screen for carrying out information transfer therebetween.

16       A program stored in the memory directs the central processing unit to  
17 communicate through the input/output unit to selectively: establish on the LCD a  
18 representation of at least one virtual button at a predetermined XY position; read the  
19 same XY position on the touch pad to determine if the virtual button has been touched;  
20 and if the virtual button has been touched, perform a predetermined action such as  
21 moving to a different menu and/or changing operating criteria. An alphanumeric  
22 message explaining the function of the virtual button is also displayed, and icon  
23 indicators may be employed to unmistakably associate a message with a virtual button.  
24 Different menus can place the virtual buttons and messages in various positions on the  
25 touch screen to facilitate intuitive programming.

26       In accordance with one aspect of the invention, environmental control selection  
27 virtual buttons are added to or eliminated from at least some menus of the operational  
28 display during preliminary programming depending on the type(s) of environmental  
29 control equipment a user actually has connected with a programmable thermostat. This  
30 feature makes ongoing user programming and system management easier and more

1 intuitive and also obviates the need for the manufacturer to fabricate and market  
2 multiple models of thermostats with different virtual buttons.

3 Thus, an image representative of a first virtual button may be shown on the  
4 touch screen display with graphics (alphanumeric characters and/or icons) on or closely  
5 associated with the first virtual button. The characters/graphics associated with the first  
6 virtual button indicate, for example, a current operating state or condition of the  
7 programmable thermostat. A user touching the first virtual button causes the device  
8 program to change the operating state or condition, and the graphics on the touch  
9 screen display also change to indicate the changed operating state or condition.

10 As an example, a first virtual button may be associated with the word "COOL" to  
11 indicate to a user that the programmable thermostat will only operate in an air  
12 conditioning mode. In the prior art, touching the first virtual button will shift the  
13 programmable thermostat from the air conditioning mode to, for example, a heating  
14 mode such that the associated text would change to "HEAT". However, in accordance  
15 with the invention, if the user has no heating equipment connected with the  
16 programmable thermostat, that fact will have earlier been entered into memory with a  
17 menu selection at a different touch screen display during preliminary programming.  
18 After that earlier entry indicating that no heater is connected with the programmable  
19 thermostat has been made, any user selecting an operating state or condition will not  
20 be shown any virtual button indicating that a heating mode is available.

21 Thus, after a simple, one-time, designation of the environmental control  
22 equipment installed in a given system using easy to understand menus, any  
23 subsequent user will only have to interact with first virtual buttons representing the  
24 actual environmental control equipment under control. It may be noted that this feature  
25 of the invention also allows a user to eliminate virtual buttons (and the associated  
26 environmental control functions) available at first interaction screens for the  
27 programmable thermostat *even if* the "eliminated" control equipment is actually installed  
28 and connected with the programmable thermostat, thereby adding a level of security  
29 against use of thermostats one user wants to preclude from use by others.

1    Description of the Drawing

2       The subject matter of the invention is particularly pointed out and distinctly  
3       claimed in the concluding portion of the specification. The invention, however, both as  
4       to organization and method of operation, may best be understood by reference to the  
5       following description taken in conjunction with the subjoined claims and the  
6       accompanying drawing of which:

7       FIG. 1A is a block diagram of a space conditioning system incorporating a  
8       programmable thermostat according to the present invention;

9       FIG. 1 is a partially cut away schematic and top view of a thermostat with a  
10      backlit dot matrix LCD employed as a display;

11      FIGs. 2 and 3 particularly illustrate a magnified section of the thermostat showing  
12      two forms of displaying contrast in a dot matrix LCD;

13      FIGs. 4 and 5 are perspective and front views, respectively, of an exemplary  
14      touch screen programmable thermostat of the present invention;

15      FIG. 6 is an exemplary pictorial of a first level interactive interface displayed on  
16      the touch screen;

17      FIG. 7 is an exemplary pictorial of a second level interactive interface displayed  
18      on the touch screen showing exemplary alternate contrast for a touch screen virtual  
19      button;

20      FIG. 8 is an exemplary pictorial of a second level interactive interface displayed  
21      on the touch screen with an exemplary sequence of virtual buttons available to a user  
22      upon touching a single virtual button;

23      FIG. 9 is an exemplary pictorial of the second level interactive interface displayed  
24      on the touch screen in FIG. 8 with a temporary "confirmation" virtual button for  
25      accepting the change of the single virtual button;

26      FIG. 10 is an exemplary pictorial of a second level interactive interface displayed  
27      on the touch screen in FIG. 8 with the function changed from "AUTOMATIC" to "COOL";

28      FIG. 11 is an exemplary pictorial of a menu displayed on the touch screen to  
29      provide a first set of menu selections including an "ADVANCED SETTINGS" virtual  
30      button;

1           FIG. 12 is an exemplary pictorial of another interactive interface displayed on the  
2 touch screen showing “ADVANCED SETTINGS” menu selections after the  
3 “ADVANCED SETTINGS” virtual button of FIG. 11 has been touched;

4           FIG. 13 is an exemplary pictorial of yet another interactive interface, reached by  
5 touching an “ENERGY WATCH” virtual button displayed on the touch screen, for entering  
6 settings for an “energy watch” mode;

7           FIG. 14 is an exemplary pictorial of a third menu interactive interface displayed  
8 on the touch screen for the “energy watch” mode;

9           FIG. 15 is exemplary pictorial of an interactive interface displayed on the touch  
10 screen of FIG. 8 as viewed in the device of FIG. 5 disposed in a horizontal mounting  
11 position;

12           FIG. 16 is exemplary pictorial of the text and graphics of the interactive  
13 interface displayed on the touch screen of FIG. 8 rotated for the device of FIG. 5  
14 disposed in a vertical mounting position;

15           FIG. 17 is exemplary pictorial of an interactive interface displayed on the touch  
16 screen of FIG. 12 as viewed in the device of FIG. 5 disposed in a horizontal mounting  
17 position;

18           FIG. 18 is exemplary pictorial of the text and graphics of the interactive  
19 interface displayed on the touch screen of FIG. 12 rotated for the device of FIG. 5  
20 disposed in a vertical position; and

21           FIGs. 19 and 20 illustrate the manner in which different first level interface  
22 screens may be reviewed and selected.

23 Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment(s)

24           Referring first to FIG. 1A, a user programmable thermostat system includes a  
25 processor 1, a touch screen 2 and a temperature sensor 5 which is disposed in a  
26 conditioned space 4. It will be understood that the processor 1 and the touch screen 2  
27 are typically situated in a common housing (shown in an exemplary form in FIG. 5).  
28 The sensor 5 may also be situated in the common housing or remotely as shown, all as  
29 very well known in the art. The common housing is usually, but not necessarily, placed  
30 in the conditioned space 4. Thus, those skilled in the art will understand that the block  
31 diagram of FIG. 1A is very general in order to best explain the invention.

1       The processor 1 includes a central processing unit (CPU) 9 in communication  
2 with a memory 8 for storing data and program information and also, via an input/output  
3 unit (I/O unit) 10, a touch pad 11 and an LCD 12 which together constitute the touch  
4 screen 2. The memory 8 may include a read-only part which is factory-programmed to  
5 include the process control program and a random-access part which stores data  
6 subject to change during operation. A settable real time clock 13 is used to keep time  
7 in the thermostat system to facilitate diverse operations, such as establishing different  
8 temperature set points (desired temperatures), during different periods of the day cycle.  
9       An analog-to-digital converter 27 (which may not be required in all systems) serves to  
10 convert any analog information received by the I/O unit 10 to digital information which is  
11 suitable for use by the CPU 9. The thermostat system may be suitably powered by a  
12 battery (not shown) and/or from equipment to which is connected.

13       Temperature information from the sensor 5 and output signals to a space  
14 conditioning (heating and/or cooling) unit 3 pass through the I/O unit 10 under control of  
15 the CPU 9 executing the process control program stored in the memory 8. Those  
16 skilled in the art will understand that if the correspondents external to the processor 1  
17 communicating with the CPU 9 are all digital in nature (e.g., if the temperature sensor 5  
18 incorporates its own analog-to-digital converter and sends a digital representation of  
19 temperature to the processor 1), then the I/O unit 10 may only constitute simple  
20 switching circuits. The LCD may optionally be backlit by any suitable means (not shown  
21 in FIG. 1A).

22       The heating/cooling equipment unit 3 may include one or more components such  
23 as a heater, a compressor-type air conditioner, a heat pump, etc.

24       Thus, in the usual manner during normal operation, the temperature sensor 5  
25 sends an electrical signal (e.g., if the sensor 5 is a simple thermistor, a resistance  
26 value; several types of temperature sensors are widely used) representative of the  
27 temperature within the conditioned space 4 which the processor can compare against a  
28 previously entered set point to determine if control signals need to be sent to the space  
29 conditioning equipment 3. For example, if the temperature in the conditioned space 4 is  
30 found to be too low when operation is in the heating mode, the processor 1 signals the  
31 space conditioning equipment 3 to circulate, through ducts 6, 7, air from/to the

1 conditioned space 4 which is heated by the space conditioning equipment before return  
2 to the conditioned space. This heating phase continues until the sensor 5 indicates that  
3 the space is now too hot (or approaching too hot) with reference to the set point such  
4 that the processor 1 sends signal(s) to the space conditioning equipment 3 to cease the  
5 heating function, all as very well known in the art. In a cooling mode, a counterpart  
6 procedure is followed. Those skilled in the art will understand that the control process  
7 typically includes such refinements as anticipation, hysteresis accommodation, fan  
8 control, etc. which are acknowledged, but are not directly relevant to the invention.

9 It may be noted that integrated circuit chips including all the processor  
10 components with all the necessary interface conditioning circuits are available off-the-  
11 shelf and are under constant refinement for increased power. The subject invention  
12 only requires the capabilities of a processor such as the processor 1, and off-the-shelf  
13 integrated circuit processor chips may be used to advantage in the subject thermostat  
14 system.

15 Thermostat systems may be user programmable or non-user programmable.  
16 The present invention relates to programmable thermostat systems in which, in the prior  
17 art, programming steps have been entered using a "tactile" touch pad while observing a  
18 display which may be an LCD or some other display type. The drawbacks of the prior  
19 art interactive thermostats have been discussed above. The present invention employs  
20 a different type of thermostat user interface; viz., the touch screen 2, in which the touch  
21 pad 11 and LCD 12 are integrated and coordinated as will be discussed below and  
22 which, in conjunction with the processor 1, provides a programmable thermostat system  
23 which is very much easier to program than in the prior art.

24 FIG. 1 shows a thermostat 100 having a processor 101 for controlling space  
25 conditioning equipment in a manner equivalent to the discussion above. The processor  
26 101 is electrically coupled with multiple connections 102 to a dot matrix LCD 104 whose  
27 individual pixels 105 are driven by suitable signals to their respective vertical columns  
28 and horizontal rows from the processor 101. Backlight panel 103 is shown for  
29 illustration as separated from a backside of LCD 104 although it is known and preferred  
30 that these two components be in close contact. Backlight panel 103 is connected to  
31 power and to processor 101 so that it can be turned on or off as needed or desired.

1       The processor 101 also optionally includes a light sensor (not shown) for sensing  
2 the illumination level in the space in which the LCD 104 is located, which illumination  
3 may be compared with a previously entered minimum illumination value to determine  
4 whether or not the room is darkened or dimly lit. If so, the display image can be  
5 reversed to improve readability. Alternatively, as the processor 101 includes a real time  
6 clock, an image reversal can be instituted at predetermined times of the 24-hour day.

7       Thus, FIG. 2 shows section 106 operated as it would typically appear during a  
8 daytime or lighted room condition. The display elements of surrounding section 107 are  
9 essentially clear and, optionally, backlight panel 103 shines through them to improve  
10 readability. The display elements of image section 108 are partially or completely  
11 opaque during daytime or in a lighted space. The combination of image section 108  
12 and surrounding section 107 therefore displays system information readily  
13 comprehensible and legible to a user in a lighted room.

14       FIG. 3 shows section 106 operated as it would during nighttime or in a dimly lit  
15 room. The image has been reversed such that the display elements of the surrounding  
16 section 107 are now partially or completely opaque, and light provided by backlight  
17 panel 103 is partially or substantially completely blocked. But, the display elements of  
18 image section 108 are now essentially clear, and the light from backlight panel 103  
19 shines through them. The current system information is thereby comprehensible and  
20 legible to a viewer in the darkened space. The result of this mode of operation is a  
21 dimmer display which is suitable for low lighting conditions.

22       In another, similar, mode of operation, the reversible image can be repeatedly  
23 reversed to "flash" all or selected items of the display upon the occurrence of certain  
24 conditions as will be described below.

25       FIGs. 4 and 5 show an exemplary touch screen thermostat 110 with a housing  
26 111 and touch screen 112 and incorporating the subject invention. Thermostat 110 has  
27 no physical buttons at all; rather, all the functions and displayed information of the  
28 programmable thermostat are available to a user by observation and interaction with  
29 the touch screen 112. In the example, the touch screen 112 is generally rectangular,  
30 thus having a long dimension and a short dimension.

1       FIG. 6 shows a first pictorial 113 presented on the touch screen 112 and  
2 including: a column 114 of interactive virtual buttons 115, 116, 117; a "current  
3 temperature" display 139; a "date" display 119; a "current time" display 120; a "heating  
4 mode active" display 118; and a "cooling mode active" display 121. Pictorial 113  
5 displays the word "AUTO" on virtual button 116 because the thermostat 110 is currently  
6 operating in an "automatic" mode to control both a heater and an air conditioner to  
7 respective setpoints shown in displays 118 and 121.

8       Pictorial 113 is a first level touch screen; i.e., a default first screen that is  
9 normally viewed by a user when first approaching the thermostat 110. The information  
10 conveyed to a user, during normal system operation of the exemplary current  
11 configuration shown in FIG. 6, are: current ambient temperature, current date and time,  
12 that a heater will turn on with reference to a set point of 21.5° C, that the air  
13 conditioning system will turn with reference to a set point of 24.0° C, that the thermostat  
14 110 is operating in the "AUTO" mode where both heating and air conditioning system  
15 components are active and that the fan is responding to only the heating and air  
16 conditioning modes (i.e., not always running).

17       When a user touches any active part of the touch screen in pictorial 113, the  
18 overall display changes to pictorial 122, a second level touch screen shown in FIG. 7.  
19 Virtual buttons 115, 116, and 117 still perform the functions described above. Newly-  
20 presented virtual buttons 127 and 129 can be selectively touched at temperature  
21 displays 128, and 130, respectively, to adjust the minimum and maximum set points.  
22 FIG. 7 also illustrates that virtual button 116 may be touched and responsively changed  
23 in step 123 by the control program to reverse contrast to be shown (in the same  
24 position previously occupied by virtual button 116) as reversed contrast virtual button  
25 124. In order to attract the user's attention to this button position, reversals can be  
26 made in short intervals so that the virtual button 116 appears to be flashing. This  
27 "flashing" emphasizes the fact that the thermostat 110 is currently operating in a  
28 particular state or condition and that a user may want to change the operating state or  
29 condition of the thermostat 110. Touching virtual button 183 directs the control system  
30 to another mode of operation which will be discussed further below.

1 FIGs. 8 to 10 show pictorial 122 in various interactive conditions. FIG. 8  
2 illustrates that virtual button 116 can undergo step 131 in response to a user touch  
3 which also causes a change in the operating state of thermostat 110 and a change of  
4 the legend associated with virtual button 116 to one of the virtual buttons in column  
5 132. In the example, successive steps 133 to 137 indicate that a user has touched  
6 virtual button 116 one or more times to cause the operating state of thermostat 110 and  
7 the legend of virtual button 116 to change with respect to those steps as follows:

8 A) at step 137, from "automatic" mode to "off" mode (none of the environmental  
9 control equipment connected with thermostat 110 will operate, and virtual button 116  
10 shows "OFF");

11 B) at step 133, from "off" mode to "heat" mode (a heater or a heat pump in heat  
12 mode operates to heat the conditioned space, and virtual button 116 shows "HEAT");

13 C) at step 134, from "heat" mode to "cool" mode (an air conditioner or heat pump  
14 operating in the cooling mode operates to cool the conditioned space, and virtual button  
15 116 shows "COOL");

16 D) at step 135, from "cool" mode to "emergency heat" mode (a backup electric  
17 heater operates to keep the conditioned space temperature above a lowest set point,  
18 and virtual button 116 shows "EMER HEAT"); and

19 E) at step 136, from "emergency heat" mode to "automatic" mode (the air  
20 conditioner and heater (or heat pump) operates in both the "heat" and "cool" mode, and  
21 virtual button 116 shows "AUTO").

22 FIGs. 9 and 10 illustrate an exemplary operation of changing, confirming and  
23 showing the change made by touching virtual button 116 twice. FIG. 9 shows that,  
24 under control of the process control program, virtual button 116 has already responded  
25 to step 133 to briefly change from the "auto" mode to the "heat" mode on the first touch  
26 and, on the second touch, has changed from the "heat" mode to the "cool" mode; and  
27 that a temporary active virtual button 138 is now displayed for a user to confirm that the  
28 user wishes to select the currently displayed function; i.e., "cool". Touching virtual  
29 button 138 under these conditions causes the changes seen in FIG. 10. It will be  
30 particularly noted in FIG. 10 that, as a feature of the system, display 118 has  
31 disappeared since the "auto" mode is no longer operational because no heating

1 function is active. Display 121 is still present in FIG. 10 because the "cool" mode is  
2 operational. Should the "heat" mode be selected and 'HEAT' shown with virtual button  
3 116, display 121 will disappear and display 118 will reappear. In the "off" mode, both  
4 displays 118 and 121 will disappear.

5 It will be appreciated that the virtual buttons of virtual buttons column 132 may  
6 alternatively be reduced in size and distributed on the surface of pictorial 113 instead of  
7 being a set of virtual buttons activated and serially viewable by invoking steps 133-137.  
8 If the virtual buttons of virtual buttons column 132 are distributed as separately and  
9 simultaneously viewable virtual buttons, it is desirable that the virtual button for the  
10 function currently activated for thermostat 110 will "flash" in contrast as described above  
11 so that the user will know which of the operating states or conditions are currently  
12 controlled by thermostat 110.

13 However, it is an important feature of the thermostat 110 that, although a user  
14 may touch virtual button 116, fewer or more than all the virtual buttons of column 132,  
15 in the example, and their associated changes in the normal operation control effected  
16 by thermostat 110 may be available to a user. The user has the ability to "edit" and/or  
17 simplify the virtual buttons column 132 to reflect the user's environmental control  
18 equipment actually connected for control by thermostat 110.

19 If fewer than or more than the virtual buttons of virtual buttons column 132 are  
20 available to the user, appropriate fewer or more touching steps will be required to cycle  
21 through the functions of thermostat 110 and the corresponding legends which may  
22 appear with virtual button 116. The particular sequence of thermostat functions  
23 available at steps 133 to 137 is only exemplary of how normal user changes between  
24 operating states or conditions are made for thermostat 110; the virtual buttons of  
25 column 132 may, of course, have a different sequence and also reflect various space  
26 conditioning equipment components which may be installed in diverse applications.

27 Thus, as more fully described below, a user is able, typically during a system  
28 setup, to eliminate or add to the virtual buttons shown in column 132 (and their  
29 associated functions) by using the touch screen in a manner that allows the user to  
30 specify what environmental control equipment components are actually controlled by  
31 thermostat 110 and, accordingly, included in column 132.

1        In practice, the thermostat manufacturer provides, in the control program, control  
2 sequences for as many different types of space conditioning components as might be  
3 used in widely diverse applications, alone or in combination. During setup, the user of a  
4 given installation eliminates those components, and graphics displays related thereto,  
5 which are irrelevant to the given installation, thus simplifying later ongoing programming  
6 and use of the thermostat. This system setup procedure is instituted by touching the  
7 "MENU" button 183 shown in FIG. 7 which the control program responds to by  
8 displaying second-level pictorial 140 on the touch screen.

9        FIG. 11 shows that pictorial 140 displays virtual buttons 141 to 149. Touching  
10 each of buttons 141 to 149 results in a new, usually third level, pictorial screen to show  
11 information and/or new buttons as follows:

12       A) for "home" icon button 141, a return to the first level, normal operation,  
13 pictorial 113 shown in FIG. 6;

14       B) for "DATE/TIME SETTINGS" button 142, for entering current date and time  
15 information;

16       C) for "SET SCREEN" button 145, for changing screen settings for the touch  
17 screen;

18       D) for "CLEAN SCREEN" button 146 to wipe the screen, e.g., with a lightly  
19 dampened cloth, without accidentally changing any of the settings; this function times  
20 out after a few seconds;

21       E) for button "FILTER MONITOR" button 147, entering, for display at pictorial  
22 113 or similar touch screen, a reminder to change or clean filters on a specified  
23 schedule;

24       F) for "VACATION SETTINGS" button 148, for entering appropriate vacation  
25 system settings;

26       G) for "PROGRAM SETTINGS" button 143, for entering automatic temperature  
27 set point adjustments, typically for each of four selectable times for each day of the  
28 week;

29       H) for "ENERGY WATCH" button 144, for display of ongoing energy  
30 consumption and costs as discussed further below; and

1           I) for "ADVANCED SETTINGS" button 149, for entering the environmental  
2 control equipment connected with thermostat 110, entering energy consumption data  
3 and costs and other functions as described.

4           Touching virtual button 149 results in display of pictorial 150 of FIG. 12. In a  
5 manner similar to button 116 of FIG. 8, buttons 154 and 158 of FIG. 12 each represents  
6 a sequence of buttons that change after being touched by a user. Button 154  
7 represents the presence or absence of air conditioning equipment connected with  
8 thermostat 110. Button 158 represents the presence or absence of heating equipment  
9 connected with thermostat 110.

10          More particularly, the virtual buttons in column 163 are those that become  
11 successively visible when a user successively touches button 154, also indicating a  
12 change in the designation of which cooling equipment is present in a given system.  
13 Similarly, in the example, buttons in column 164 are those that become successively  
14 visible when a user successively touches button 158, also indicating a change in the  
15 designation of which heating equipment is present in the given system.

16          In the example, invoking steps 160, 161 and 162 respectively cause a change in  
17 the function and legend appearing at button 154 from "heat pump" mode to "air  
18 conditioner" mode, from "air conditioner" mode to "no compressor" mode (no air  
19 conditioning equipment), and from "no compressor" mode to "heat pump" mode. The  
20 memory program contains programming adapted to cause effective operation of a heat  
21 pump or compressor type air conditioner depending on the one selected at button 154.  
22 If the "no compressor" mode is selected at button 154, the buttons column 132 of FIG.  
23 8 will lack the "cool" and "auto" buttons and functions.

24          Cycling through steps 165, 166, 167, 168 and 169 respectively cause a change  
25 in the function and legend at button 158 from "electric furnace" mode (presence in the  
26 given system of an electric powered furnace) to "emer. elect. furnace" mode (additional  
27 presence of an emergency electric furnace), from "emer. elect. furnace" mode to "gas  
28 furnace" mode (presence of a gas furnace), from "gas furnace" mode to "oil furnace"  
29 mode (presence of an oil furnace), from "oil furnace" mode to "furnace off" mode (lack  
30 of heating equipment) and from "furnace off" mode to "electric furnace" mode. If the  
31 "furnace off" mode is selected at button 158, the buttons column 132 of FIG. 8 will lack

1 the "heat" and "emer heat" mode buttons and functions as well as the "auto" mode  
2 button and function. The control program stored in memory contains routines adapted  
3 to cause effective operation of any combination of the designated equipment.

4 Pictorial 155 of FIG. 12 also shows virtual button 151 for changing the  
5 temperature designation in the touch screen from Centigrade to Fahrenheit, buttons  
6 153 and 157 for entering certain set point related parameters, button 155 for entering  
7 an installer message and button 146 for entering security settings.

8 FIG. 13 shows pictorial 171 which is activated by a user's touching button 152 of  
9 FIG. 12. Pictorial 171 is a menu permitting entry of energy requirement and cost  
10 information using cost determination information entry virtual buttons 172, 173, 174 and  
11 175. Touching button 172 changes the numerical legend in increments to indicate  
12 kilowatts per hour required of a compressor if air conditioning equipment is present.  
13 Thus, the user is able to enter into the energy required for operation of a cooling  
14 component in the system. In a similar manner for buttons 173 and 174, a user can  
15 enter the energy requirements for a heating furnace or heat pump if in the system and  
16 that of a system fan. Button 175 allows the user to enter the per kilowatt hour cost of  
17 energy in the user's locality. The equipment energy requirements and energy cost are  
18 stored in the memory and used by the control program to calculate and display  
19 cumulative energy used and cumulative cost of that energy for a monitored period. The  
20 memory stores in a cumulative amount the periods in which the air conditioner, furnace,  
21 heat pump, fan and/or other environmental control equipment operates, and calculates  
22 and displays, as shown in pictorial 176 of FIG. 14 the running energy cost information.  
23 In the example, display 177 shows the number of days for which the energy information  
24 has been accumulated. Displays 178, 179, 179, and 180 show energy used by  
25 respectively and cumulatively the air conditioning compressor, the furnace and the fan,  
26 with the total energy being used by that equipment in display 181 and the total cost of  
27 that energy shown in display 182.

28 It will be understood that the user, with a few button manipulations, can easily  
29 determine what the running cost is for the use of the environmental control equipment  
30 in the user's system. In the example, the user can successively touch: an active part of  
31 the touch screen of pictorial 113 of FIG. 6, the "MENU" button 183 of pictorial 122 of

1 FIG. 8 and the "ENERGY WATCH" button 144 of pictorial 140 of FIG. 11 to arrive at the  
2 display of FIG. 14. Alternatively, the "ENERGY WATCH" button 144 can instead or  
3 also be provided on the touch screen of pictorial 113 of FIG. 6 so that a single button  
4 touch at the first level interface will bring the touch screen directly to the display of FIG.  
5 14.

6 Attention is now directed to FIG. 15 which shows that pictorial 113 has  
7 alphanumeric text on the buttons and displays disposed horizontally for easy reading,  
8 as does the same alphanumeric text on the same buttons and displays in pictorial 113A  
9 of FIG. 16. However, the housing 111 of FIG. 15 has been rotated 90 degrees to obtain  
10 the vertical orientation of the housing 111 of FIG. 16. The control program of  
11 thermostat 110 can reorient the display from that shown in pictorial 113 to that shown in  
12 pictorial 113A by suitably remapping the column and row drive signals to the individual  
13 pixels of the LCD. This feature can be invoked, in one embodiment, by touching the  
14 "SCREEN SET" button 145 of pictorial 140 shown in FIG. 11 for a predetermined period  
15 of time (say five seconds), which action is sensed by the control program to cause a  
16 change of pictorial 113 to pictorial 113A or vice versa. All the pictorials for the touch  
17 screen for the thermostat 110 would be similarly reoriented, and FIGs. 17 and 18 show  
18 a similar translation of pictorial 155 to pictorial 155A.

19 This feature is not limited to a translation of only 90 degrees of the alphanumeric  
20 text, graphics and buttons of thermostat 110 as described above. The memory  
21 program, combined with the capability of a dot matrix type LCD, with its individually  
22 addressable pixels disposed in rows and columns, can cause a rotation of all those  
23 aspects of the touch screen to be rotated incrementally through 360 degrees so that a  
24 user can mount the housing 111 in whatever angled orientation is desired.

25 Attention is now directed to FIG. 19 in which pictorial 184 is obtained by touching the  
26 "SET SCREEN" button 145 of pictorial 140 shown in FIG. 11 for a predetermined period  
27 of time (say five seconds). This touching action is sensed by the control program which  
28 causes a display change from pictorial 140 shown in FIG. 11 to the pictorial 184 shown  
29 in FIG. 19. Pictorial 184 contains a sub-pictorial 185 that is a framed and generalized  
30 inactive version of first level interactive pictorial 113 shown in FIG. 6. The user sees in  
31 sub-pictorial 185 a general layout of virtual buttons, text and graphics that can be

1 selected to view as the pictorial of the first level interactive interface. This user  
2 selection can be made if the "SET SCREEN" button 145 of pictorial 184 shown in FIG.  
3 19 is not touched for a predetermined period of time (say five seconds). However, the  
4 user can select other general layouts of virtual buttons, text and graphics that will  
5 thereafter be seen at the first level interactive interface.

6 Thus, referring now to FIG. 20. pictorial 186 contains a sub-pictorial 187 that is  
7 an alternate general layout of virtual buttons, text and graphics for the first level  
8 interactive interface that can be selected by a user. Sub-pictorial 187 appears if virtual  
9 button 145 is touched for a predetermined period of time (say five seconds). In sub-  
10 pictorial 187, a row of virtual buttons 191 are aligned along a top part of sub-pictorial  
11 187 which will become the first level interactive interface shown in FIG. 8 when normal  
12 operation is resumed. When a return is made to the alternative first level interactive  
13 interface, touching any one of the virtual buttons 191 causes the control program of the  
14 thermostat to change operating states to one associated with that one virtual button. In  
15 one embodiment, a touched virtual button 191 is visually distinguished from the other  
16 virtual buttons 191 so the user knows which operating state currently controls the  
17 thermostat. One form of effecting that visual distinction is shown for virtual button 188.  
18 Virtual button 188 after being touched causes the control program to change the  
19 operating state of the thermostat to an "automatic" mode (the air conditioner and heater  
20 together, or a heat pump, operates in both the "heat" and "cool" modes, and virtual  
21 button 188 shows "AUTO"). Thereafter, the visible representation of virtual button 188  
22 changes according to step 190 to the contrasting virtual button 189 and back to the  
23 form shown for virtual button 188 at short intervals to simulate a "flashing" virtual button.  
24 Virtual buttons 191 represent the same operating states represented by the similarly  
25 named virtual buttons of virtual buttons in column 132 shown in FIG. 8.

26 FIGs. 19 and 20 represent only two of many possible arrangements of virtual  
27 buttons, text and graphics that can be made available for selection by a user for the first  
28 level interactive interface. In the above exemplary method of making that selection, the  
29 user touches or refrains from touching the "SET SCREEN" button 145. This feature  
30 extends the ability of the user to select from one of several arrangements of virtual  
31 buttons, text and graphics at any of the levels of interactive or passive (information or

1 graphics only) interface of the thermostat. This feature may be implemented by steps  
2 other than touching or refraining from touching the "SET SCREEN" button 145.

3 While the principles of the invention have now been made clear in an illustrative  
4 embodiment, there will be immediately obvious to those skilled in the art many  
5 modifications of structure, arrangements, proportions, the elements, materials, and  
6 components, used in the practice of the invention which are particularly adapted for  
7 specific environments and operating requirements without departing from those  
8 principles.